

An Area Agent's Perspective on Pest and Pathogen Emergencies

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Cooperative Extension Agents are considered boots on the ground for the land grant university system. We serve as an unbiased, research-based source of information for all farmers throughout the state, generally at little to no cost to the farmer. The potential impact of our work hinges largely on the relationships we build with our clientele. Confidentiality, timeliness, and accuracy are key to the success of those relationships. Extension Agents visit with farmers and check fields upon the farmer's request when problems arise, but also check fields at random where strong client-Agent relationships exist, or where on-farm research is hosted. Some pest or disease problems can be identified quickly in the field. Some problems require the use of a microscope or other technology, which may or may not be handled at the local County Extension office. Other problems require a sample be submitted to a diagnostic lab. The County Agent may consult with Area Specialized Agents or Specialists for diagnostic support or up-to-date management recommendations. Agents may need to alert other growers, neighboring County Agents, industry, etc., depending on the potential spread of the pest/pathogen, or where or how the infestation/infection originated. A variety of communication methods are available, but grower confidentiality must often be maintained. The overarching goal of sustaining yields and profits for all farmers requires timely, accurate diagnosis, access to effective management options, and possibly effective communication of potential risk to other stakeholders. Extension Agents are a critical and trusted conduit in this process.